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QUAKER HILL
SERIES

XIII. Some Glimpses of
the Past.

BY

ALICIA HOPKINS TABER.





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Book 577

SOME GLIMPSES OF THE PAST.

BY

ALICIA HOPKINS TABER.

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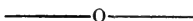
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SOME GLIMPSES OF THE PAST.



Our ancestors who settled this part of the country were of English descent and all wished for landed property, but with the primitive modes of transportation and the poor roads it was necessary to have different kinds of business carried on in each neighborhood, consequently while all were nominally farmers, many conducted some other branch of business as well. Thus we had in this neighborhood Ransom Aldrich, tanner and currier; John Toffey, and later Joseph Seely, hatters; some of the Arnolds were also hatters. A great uncle of our townsman, Richard Osborn, one Amos Osborn, was a tanner, and also made pottery. Jephtha Sabin and Josiah Hungerford were saddlers and harness-makers. Then there was the store, which was Daniel Merritt's in the early 1760's and descended to his sons.

Daniel and John Merritt sold to Daniel

Peckham and Josiah Hungerford, who sold to one Whitely. He later sold it to James Craft, whose store is remembered by many of the older people of today. There was Peter Field, a silversmith, whose shop was robbed here, and we hear of him later as having a jewelry store in New York. Henry Birdsell was a butcher, but he did not keep a shop where his neighbors could go for meat as they needed it. His method of doing business was to kill once a week, then take his meat and drive from house to house until he succeeded in selling it all. This often necessitated his driving well into the town of Dover and sometimes even into Washington before he was able to turn toward home with empty wagon.

Abram Thomas was a blacksmith and it is said that he made the nails that were used in the construction of this meeting-house. It is also a tradition that guns were made on the Hill, for use in the time of the Revolution.

George Kirby came to Quaker Hill about 1780 and had a blacksmith shop, and later there was a shop on the present site of Mrs. Scott's cottage, which was known as Marsh's blacksmith shop.

Hiram Sherman had a wagon makers'

shop, where coffins were also made, as must have been some of the tools used on the farms; it is known that the first revolving hay rakes used in this country were made there.

Albro Akin had a saw mill in what is now known as the Glen; also he and his brother, Daniel, had stores on opposite sides of the road on the places now recognized as their homesteads.

John Toffee kept a country store at the corner. John Hays was a tailor, and Steven Riggs a shoemaker; then there was Isaac Ingersoll, a tanner, making three tanneries on the Hill, but they must have had plenty to do as each farmer must himself have the leather prepared for all the shoes of their often numerous families and the harnesses and saddles needed on their farms. Just below the Hill Wm. Taber had what I suppose were called woolen mills, consisting of a carding machine and fulling mill; they also colored, pressed and dressed the cloth. He also had a grist mill a little further down the stream.

Mrs. Jedediah Wanzer tells of a grist mill in the glen just off the steep rock below the present dam where the grain was taken in at the top of the building, which had all disappeared when she was

a little girl, the millstone alone being left. My father remembers hearing that there used to be a forge on the Glen stream and that magnetic ore was drawn there from Brewster to be worked up.

The dairy farming of the present day was an unheard of thing. In those times the cow was not the all important animal, although each farmer kept enough cows to provide his own family with milk, butter and cheese, and each would keep sufficient sheep to provide the wool needed each year. They all raised more or less hogs, and where the number which exceeded the needs of the family were not sufficient to make it pay for the farmer to go to the river with them, they were taken to the nearby store keeper who took them in barter. In fact most of the trading at the stores was done by barter, as money was then scarce. Occasionally there was a farm where more cows were kept and the chief interest was that of making butter and cheese, like that of David Irish, where butter was made and hogs fattened. He also kept fine wool sheep. Daniel and David Merritt, some of the Allens, my grandfather, Johnathan Akin Taber, and George P. Taber were all as far as I can find that raised the fine wool sheep to any extent.

My grandfather kept about eleven hundred, some merino and some saxony. I do not know how many the others kept. Fine wool was worth from six to ten shillings a pound. In this county at that time were at least two factories for the manufacture of fine broadcloth, one at Hart's Village, owned by Isaac Merritt, the other that of Titus & Sweet, near Poughkeepsie. But the chief business of most farmers was the fattening of cattle. The cattle were generally bought when from two to three years old, usually in the fall, kept through the winter and the following summer fattened and sold. They were the only things that did not have to go to the river to reach the market. From all over the country they were driven to New York on foot, and the road through the valley was the main thoroughfare for them. Monday was the market day in New York and all started in time to reach the city by Saturday. From Pawling the cattle were started on Thursday, and those from greater distances planned to reach this part of their journey on that day. It used to be said that the dealers could tell what the market would be in New York on the following Monday by watching the cattle that passed through Pawling on

Thursday. The cattle were collected and taken to the city by drovers, which was a great business in those days. Hotels or taverns were provided for their accommodation at frequent intervals along the road. Ira Griffin was a drover and Mr. Archibald Dodge remembers when a boy going to New York with him and his cattle, walking all the way. There were also droves of cattle other than fat ones, on the road, some called store cattle, and the books of Mr. Benjamin V. Haviland, who kept one of the taverns, show that in the year 1847 there had been kept on his place 27,784 cattle, 30,000 sheep and 700 mules, and it is said that occasionally there would be 2,000 head between his tavern and that of John Preston's in Dover. When Mr. Albert J. Akin was a young man he was considered an expert judge and buyer of steers for fattening and generally had the finest herd of fat cattle.

Machinery was very primitive. For the gathering of the hay there was nothing but the scythe, the hand rake and the pitchfork, consequently it required much more time and many hands to secure the crop. The scythes were of domestic manufacture, as well as the forks, being made at the black-

smiths in the neighborhood. The hay was often drawn together with ropes and the larger part of it stacked out of doors and fed there, as they did not think it necessary to house their cattle in winter.

They had standards of work and knew what a good day's work was. To mow an acre of heavy grass in a forenoon, one might have a boy to stir the hay, then rake it into win-rows and cock it before night was considered a large day's work, and a man who could do this would be called an expert, and would receive a dollar a day. The usual wage in haying was 75c.; a man got 50c. a day for hoeing corn or any ordinary work, and there was considerable talk because at that time they had to pay a half a dollar for their supper on the boat when going to New York. To reach New York people were obliged to drive to the Hudson River and take a sloop or later a barge, which usually went down in the night, thus finding themselves in the city in the morning.

Grandfather had a large farm and was obliged to have at least a dozen men and often more to gather his hay and grain. About the year 1812 great-grandfather sold 1,000 bushels of wheat for two and a half dollars per bushel. All men that were

employed on the farm in those days boarded in the farmer's house, so that in times of extra work on the farm the family was so much larger that it necessitated more help in the house as well. Extra meals had to be furnished, as in haying the men would commence work at least an hour before sunrise and work as long as they could see, having supper by candle light. This, with the early breakfast, necessitated the substantial lunches which were carried out into the field in the middle of both the forenoon and afternoon.

Uncle Johnathan Akin used to hire his haying done and paid six shillings and a quart of rum per acre.

Men that can look back to those times agree in considering that the resources of the farm were much greater than at the present time. Much more cultivation was carried on, although their plows were all made of wood, except a piece of iron on the point of the share and an iron rod which held it to the beam; the first cast iron plow we hear of being used on the Hill was in 1825. Flax was an important crop, some to be spun at home and some sold.

Wheat, oats and rye were then raised in

this part of the country on a much larger scale. Fields of peas were raised for the hogs, and potatoes grew easily, not being troubled by the potato bug.

It was customary to have cider on the table at every meal, the ladies would have their tea, but most of the men drank cider largely, many to excess, consequently there were great quantities made in the fall and stored in the cellars during the winter. A large farmer would lay out a great deal of work, gathering from ten to twenty cart-loads of apples, hooping and cleaning barrels, and many ground and pressed their own cider, then the large casks were drawn to and placed in the cellars. This usually occupied a large part of the month of October. In the spring a portion of the hard cider would be taken to a distiller, and made into cider brandy to be used in the haying and harvest field, at sheep washings, butchering, raisings, shearings and on many other occasions. Some was always on the sideboard and often on the table. In most households there were sideboards well furnished with spirits, brandy, home-made wine, metheglin, etc., which were offered to guests. It was a fashion or custom to

offer a drink of some kind whenever a neighbor called.

My grandfather being obliged to have so many men for at least two months each year became disgusted with the custom of furnishing so much cider and spirits to the men in the field, as many of them would come to the house at supper time without any appetite and in a quarrelsome mood. There would be wrestlings and fighting during the evening and the chain in the well could be heard rattling all night long. So one year, probably about 1835 or '36, he decided that he would do it no longer. His brother and many of his neighbors tried to dissuade him and prophesied that he would not be able to get sufficient help to secure his crops, but he declared he would give up farming before he would endure it any longer, and announced when securing his extra help for that summer that he would furnish no cider or spirits in the field, but that coffee and other drinks would be carried out and that every man should have a ration of spirits at each meal. Most of the men he had had in past years came back and seemed to be glad to be out of the way of temptation. The next year he dispensed with the ration at meal times,

and the custom grew among his neighbors with surprising rapidity, it was but a few years when it became general, with a few exceptions, where the farmer himself was fond of it, until today such a thing is not heard of, and in fact, the farmer, like the railroads and other large corporations, do not care to employ a man that is in the habit of using spirits at all.

In the winter the thrashing was done mostly by hand with the flail, but some spread the grain on the large barn floor and it was trodden out by horses. In the early part of the winter the fire wood was cut, then hauled when the opportunity came. By the first of April they expected to have the wood for the year cut up and piled.

On my grandfather's farm from forty to sixty hogs were raised and killed when a year and a half old, the feeding of which meant much labor and time, as fourteen large arch kettles of food had to be cooked each day in early winter. They fed the cattle and sheep in the fields and when heavy snows came the sheep were often buried and had to be searched for or lost. Then there were many stones on the farms as our stone walls prove. Grandfather Field kept three yoke of oxen, which drew

stone to clear his land at all times when not otherwise needed.

The washing and shearing of large flocks of sheep we know nothing of here today.

We must conclude they could not have suffered from loneliness or ennui; busy people never do. Mr. Richard Osborn tells of a hat which his father bought in Poughkeepsie, in the crown of which was "Domestic industry is the wealth of nations," and it would seem that most of the people of this community had taken this as their motto.

There could not have been many idle moments with the numerous and various duties for all, both outdoors and in. In the house aside from the ever present spinning there must have been much sewing as all garments were made at home. The men's fine shirts and many other things were finished with stitching as even and as fine as by the machine stitching we know so well, but done by hand. They knit all the stockings, both woolen for winter and linen for summer, as well as the mittens needed.

Then there were the linen or muslin curtains for windows and beds and the bed valences to be made and frequently

laundered; also the heavy woolen or quilted ones which were hung in their places for the winter to keep out the bitter cold.

The fuel being all wood there was a great quantity of ashes, which were carefully housed until the proper time came for leaching them for soap, and every house wife had a receipt for making soft soap, for which all superfluous grease was carefully saved. Soft soap was sold to the fullers or taken by the store keepers, and brought four dollars a barrel. Then they had to provide their own lights, and the making of the candles took much time and patience. They were obliged to prepare the wool or the rags for the carpets. In the fall large quantities of apple sauce and apple butter were made, but our grandmothers seemed to find time for their fancy work, the making of those marvellous patch work quilts, "the double Irish chain," the "sunburst," "goose-chase," "chariot wheel," those with large stars and small stars and various other patterns, and with borders having vines with leaves and flowers and even birds, but all giving abundant opportunity for the beautiful quilting that must ever be admired.

The people were sociable and hospitable,

if not far from a meal time any friend or stranger coming near the house for either business or pleasure was always invited to come in and partake. When inviting friends or neighbors it was to spend the day and they to come early in the forenoon and stay until after supper. Much visiting was done and long journeys taken for that purpose. I remember hearing of Aunt Phebe Quimby, who lived at Chappaqua, Westchester County, who used to come in her own coach once a year to visit her friends on Quaker Hill, going on to visit those at Nine Partners, but she did not waste her time on those long drives, as it is said that she knit all the way.

It is known that Anna Slocum, the wife of George Kirby, went back to New Bedford on horse-back six times. In going out of an evening a young lady did not ride her own horse, but was mounted on a pillion behind her escort. There were no one horse wagons, but most riding was done in wagon chairs (an armed chair made wide enough for two to sit in), which were placed in a lumber box wagon, although some had a more fancy wagon made by Hiram Sherman, the box of which rounded up at both ends, with paneled side

boards and half as high again in the rear as in front; the seats were also placed on slender sticks reaching up and back a few feet from where fastened to the bottom of the wagon, thus furnishing a sort of spring. These wagons were generally painted yellow or green. Many of the Society of Friends had regular coaches not very different from those of the present day. The coach was probably the English carriage in common use at the time of George Fox, or the organization of the Friends' Society. The first one horse conveyance was the chaise, having a top and but two wheels.

There has also been many changes in what we call table etiquette and the manner in which the food was served. We have all heard of the traditional time when the food was served in a large trencher in the center of the table from which all of the family ate, but that was long before the days of Quaker Hill. The earliest we learn of here the head of the house helped each member of the family to the main dinner, but butter was put upon the table on two or three plates, according to the size of the family, each using from the plate nearest them, and so with preserves or sauce as they called it, although there might be

more dishes of it; they were not individual dishes. Four glasses were all that were considered necessary upon a table at one meal.

A part of our grandmothers' training as she grew into young ladyhood was to be able to pour her tea from her cup into her saucer nicely without spilling any and then to be able to lift the saucer to her lips in a graceful manner. At each plate was placed what the children might call a cunning little bread and butter plate, but was really a cup plate. All were taught to eat with their knives, as the forks of the day had but two tines, making them very unhandy, but the knife must be properly used. It was almost as shocking then to eat with the edge of the knife toward the face as we consider it now to use a knife at all. In fact many of the knives were made with a rounding extension on the back near the end forming something like a flat spoon. There are some of them still left in the town. The spoon was always left standing in the cup as it was equivalent to asking for another cup of tea to remove it from the cup and place it in the saucer.

Another feature of those days which differs much from our own was the man-

ner in which the town took care of the poor, of whom there seemed to be a large number. There were two Overseers of the Poor and the office was no sinecure.

A meeting of the Overseers and the Justices of the Peace was held once a year for the disposing of the poor, or putting out of the poor, as they called it. For many years they met at the house or inn of Gideon Slocum & Son. The poor people were given into the keeping of the lowest bidder and the amounts paid per year differed presumably according to their ability to work, and ranged usually between thirteen and forty-five dollars per year, but for one man there was paid eighty-five dollars. Then there were many others for whom the town seemed to pay only at times and others where house rent was provided while for still others wood and provisions were furnished from time to time, and there seems to have been a great tendency to try to get the poor out of one town into another; hence the state law that no one could rent a house to any person from any other town without the consent of the Overseers of the Poor. We have applications, one from George Kirby and the other from Justus Sheldon, where they assure the Over-

seers of the Poor that their prospective tenants are known to have such and such property, or are able bodied, self supporting people. Still there were numerous law suits between the different towns and we are told of twenty-five dollars being given to one man to take his old father down to Delaware and leave him.

Tramps were plenty, but not strangers that roamed the whole country, for the same ones returned to a locality year after year and were often known by name, but were a thieving, wretched set. Once when a baking was taken from the brick oven and set upon the hearth, one of these tramps came along and, the outside door being open, he took two pies and going down the road a ways, got over the fence and ate them. Again one helped himself to a couple of silver spoons. On both of these occasions some farm hands followed them and took them to the Delavan House, at what is now called Akin's Corner, near Patterson, where were several athletic young men, who assisted in searching the one and finding the spoons with their handles bent up inside the three or four coats he was wearing, and in both cases

the tramps were treated to a thorough flogging with a horse whip.

The people then felt much the need of improvement in their roads and in their means of transportation. For the improvement of the roads most traveled turnpikes were formed. In fact, turnpikes seemed to be a fad in those days all over the state and probably a necessary one. The longest one I learn of in this part of the country was from Cold Spring on the Hudson River to New Milford in Connecticut. The turnpike in which the people of this neighborhood were most interested was the one incorporated April 3, 1818, and reads "That Albro Akin, John Merritt, Gideon Slocum, Job Crawford, Charles Hurd, William Taber, Joseph Arnold, Egbert Carey, Gabriel L. Vanderburgh, Newel Dodge, Jurs., and such other persons as shall associate for the purpose of making a good and sufficient turnpike road in Dutchess Co." It was named as the Pawlings and Beekman Turnpike, being a portion of what is known as the Poughkeepsie road passing over the West Mountain, but we do not find that anything was done until after the act was revived in 1824, when Joseph C. Seeley, Benoni Pearce,

Samuel Allen, Benjamin Burr and George W. Slocum were associated with them. It is said that before the turnpike was built the road was so full of stones, large and small, that the people of today would consider it impassable for an empty wagon, to say nothing of drawing a load over it. In the fall of the year it is said that toward evening one could hear the hammering of the wheels of the wagons on the stones of this road at a distance of four or five miles.

The first attempt at public transportation of which we learn was a canal laid out from Albany to New York through what is now called the Harlem Valley, but cannot learn who were the promoters. A map of it was found among my great-grandfather's papers and we have a letter to my grandfather from Albany with regard to the advisability of putting a railroad up this valley, saying that knowing he was so much interested in the proposed canal, they wrote him hoping that he would interest the public-spirited men in this neighborhood in the new plan.

Many, if not all, did become interested, but some must have objected, as we hear of one man who said that whose ever farm that passed through would have to give up

fattening cattle, as it would be impossible to keep a steer on the place. Many through whose land it did pass gave the necessary land and right of way, and some also gave much time and took long journeys in its interest, those doing the most of this as far as I can learn were Jonathan Akin, Daniel D. Akin and J. Akin Taber. The latter's home being near the line of the railroad, was honored by visits from most of the prominent men interested in the undertaking.

This section of the road was opened on December 31, 1849, which meant much to the business interests, and is responsible for many of the changes.

Mrs. Laura Sherwood, who is now in her 95th year, was the daughter of Sylvanus Stewart, and was born and grew to womanhood two and a half miles east of this meeting house in Sherman, Conn. She has given me the following recollections of her childhood days:

RECOLLECTIONS OF MRS. LAURA SHERWOOD.

According to my early recollections of farm life, its industries and resources in my native town, many cattle were fatted and

driven to the New York market, often by the farmers themselves.

Mixed farming was the rule, every farm producing nearly everything required by the family in the way of food and clothing, even to "sweetness;" for in the spring the maple sugar and syrup, and in the fall the sweet apple juice boiled down to molasses made the demand upon the southern cane fields much smaller than it would otherwise have been. Wheat, rye, oats and corn were the grains raised, and among the most important crops was flax, sowed in the spring, pulled in the fall, when ripe, and laid down in the fields to "rot," then broken and swungled, and "hatchelled," leaving the fibre clear. In the winter it was carded, spun, and woven for clothing, bedding and table linen, towelling and bagging. The flax was also an article of barter and commerce. Every farmer kept a flock of sheep and when sheared in June the wool was "picked," "greased," and taken to the carding machine, sometimes carried many miles over the hills to the factory at New Milford on horseback by myself, a little girl of ten or twelve, with a huge bundle of wool or, in returning, of rolls, towering above my head, fastened

on the back of my horse behind the saddle.

When carded, the rolls were spun in the house, the daughters beginning at eight or ten years old, besides women hired for that purpose. A loom was in every house and many wheels for flax and wool. On every farm was kept a flock of geese, which were picked once in six weeks to keep up the supply of feather beds and to furnish the requisite number for the outfit of each daughter of the family.

In addition to the farm work, in many instances, other industries were carried on, as wagon making, tanning, a saw mill or grist mill, a fulling mill, flax mill, or carding machine, a blacksmith shop or cabinet shop—as most of the best furniture was made in the town, much of it now standing firm as well as ornamental, outlasting the more modern machine made, even after nearly a century of use.

Butter and cheese making were an important part of the business and income of the farmer's family, the butter being packed and sent weekly to the Hudson River boats for New York markets, or to Bridgeport or New Haven—a two-days' journey in either case. The cheese was ripened, or cured,

being rubbed and turned every day, and kept until the dealers came around to inspect and purchase.

The tailor came to the house for his annual visit (sometimes it was a tailoress), to make up the woolen clothing for the men of the family and outside wraps for the women (called "great-coats"), after the cloth was prepared, that is, woven, fulled and pressed,—the thread being spun and twisted by hand.

The shoemaker also came to make the yearly supply of boots and shoes from the leather tanned from the skins of the animals slaughtered for the table, and, with shoe bench and lapstone, was a familiar figure in every home in autumn and winter days.

In building, most of the timber was taken from the "wood lot," the finer lumber drawn by horses or oxen from distant cities; the shingles were hand-made, rived or cut by hand from blocks sawed into proper length, and shaved down with a drawing knife by an expert hired for that purpose

There were no stoves in use, the open fires on the hearth, skillfully built with a huge "back log" and "fore-stick," furnished

warmth and ventilation; and over and before these great fires were done the cooking and all other work requiring heat. As matches were unknown, these fires were never expected to go out; but if by chance or neglect such a thing occurred, some one must go to a neighbor's house to "borrow fire;" so, being the youngest, I was sent on such occasions to bring a shovel of coals, or a burning brand, to start anew.

Journeys for business or pleasure were made mostly on horseback, and I took long rides on the horse behind my mother to visit relatives out of town when she was past fifty. Others of our family traveled in the same way to visit relatives in what was then called "the west" until the Erie Canal was built, and they could go in an easier way, and it was considered as great a wonder as the trolley was to us in later times,

As there were no markets in country towns, every farmer was his own butcher, and the supply of fresh meat was kept up by a system of borrowing and lending among neighbors.

The ceaseless round of varied industry left little time for idleness, yet there was no lack of social intercourse and amusement.

Thanksgiving Day was the great occasion for family gatherings; then the large brick ovens and tin bakers (or ovens made of tin to stand before the open fireplace), were kept hotter than usual, baking the chicken pies, spare-ribs, mince, pumpkin and tart pies (a delicious pastry filled with cider apple sauce, spiced and highly seasoned), while the turkey hung on the spit before the fire. An old Quaker Hill merchant once said he always knew when the Yankees were to hold Thanksgiving, for they came to his store for so many groceries, spices, &c., and I remember going there on horseback, when a child, for tea and groceries.

The biennial training of the local militia was another of the great days of the year, when the martial music of the fife and drum roused the enthusiasm and patriotism of the community, especially the young, and when the General Training was held in the town of Sherman, bringing the general officers in full uniform and high military authority. It was a day still remembered and talked of as its traditions and incidents are handed down from one generation to another, an event only second to

General Washington's review of the army in Pawling.

The visits of the weekly mail carrier kept the people in touch with the outside world, bringing his small bag of papers and letters from Bridgeport on foot, and I well remember his loud cry announcing his arrival: "News! News!! Some lies and some truths!!" Letters were few and precious, with postage at 25 cents each. A strong characteristic of these times was a deep reverence for the Sabbath, the church and the minister, always an influence toward the moral uplifting of any community.

Also another mark of the times was ambition for education. Teachers were painstaking, thorough and severe, and awakened a desire for the highest possible mental attainment, thus stimulating "high thinking," with the necessary "plain living," at wages of from \$4.00 to \$10.00 per month.

The minister, who was also school inspector, on his salary of \$200 or \$300, and the proceeds of his small farm, which he carried on himself, educated his sons at Yale, and sent them out to worthily fill pulpits of their own, and many other young men of the town, by teaching and in other

ways, worked their way through Yale, and fitted themselves for professions, sometimes walking the forty miles or more, to and from home—as there was no public conveyance—a practical system of athletics not attended by danger to life and limb or any of the objectionable features of modern athletic fields.

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